



The President's Daily Brief

13 March 1972

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Over the weekend the North Vietnamese launched the most serious attacks in the Sam Thong area in almost two months. (Page 1)

Lon Nol's political moves are discussed on Page 2.

Cypriot President Makarios appears to be trying to increase pressure on Athens. (Page 3)

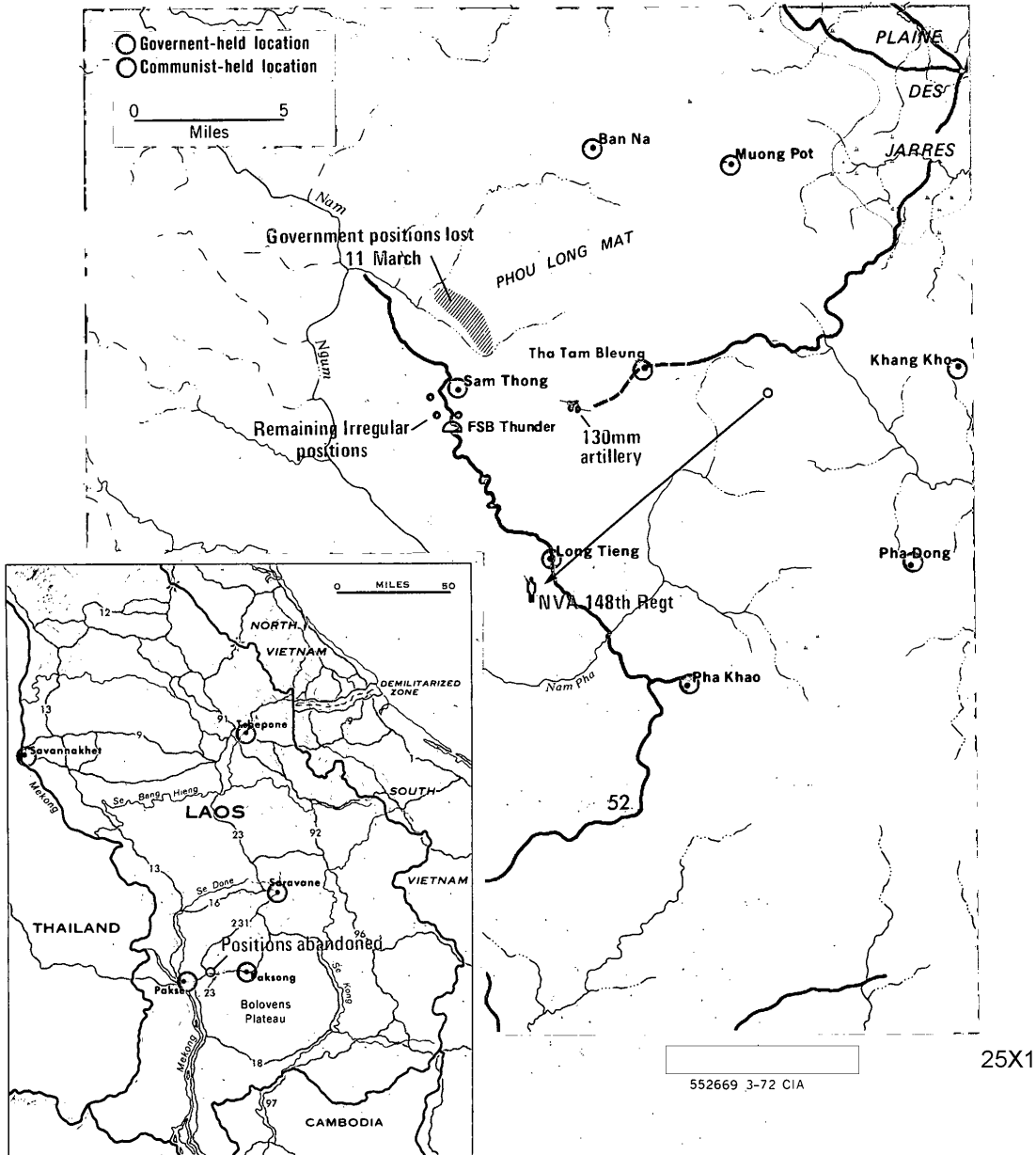
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LONG TIENG AREA



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LAOS

Elements of the North Vietnamese 141st Regiment drove irregular units from positions north and east of Sam Thong on 11 March in the most serious attacks in this area in almost two months. Government forces also abandoned artillery base Thunder, which was not under heavy attack. Although Communist probes and shellings continue, the situation has stabilized for the time being. Most of the 1,500 irregulars in the Sam Thong area are regrouping at three positions to the southwest. The Long Tieng Valley has been shelled, and the airstrip has been closed sporadically, but no Communist ground attacks have been reported there.

The weekend activity could be the beginning of an anticipated Communist drive to take the Long Tieng complex. The North Vietnamese are continuing to move forces closer to the Sam Thong and Long Tieng bases. The headquarters of the North Vietnamese 148th Regiment, which was diverted to the Plaine des Jarres area during Vang Pao's offensive in February, has now moved back toward Long Tieng, and 130-mm. artillery guns have been moved west from the Plaine to the Tha Tam Bleung area. Vang Pao has been preparing an offensive force of some 4,500 men for a new spoiling operation. He will now have to decide whether to reinforce the 6,500 men defending Long Tieng and Sam Thong or to go ahead with strikes at Communist rear areas in an effort to lessen the pressure on the bases.

The government has also suffered a military setback in south Laos. Two irregular battalions over the weekend abandoned positions on the Route 23/231 road junction some 12 miles east of Pakse city. A fresh irregular force has moved into the area, where elements of the North Vietnamese 9th Regiment have been active for the past two weeks, presumably trying to tie down government forces well away from the infiltration corridor. The proximity of the Communists to Pakse is having an adverse psychological effect on the government.

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CAMBODIA

Over the weekend Lon Nol dissolved the constituent assembly, suspended work on a new constitution, dismissed the cabinet, and assumed the title of president. He told Ambassador Swank yesterday that he intends to restructure the executive branch of government but that he has not yet decided on the specifics.

Lon Nol appears to have had only the most cursory consultation with principal figures within the government. He apparently also gave little consideration to the impact on political elements already restive at what they consider to be the betrayal of a promise of more democratic government after Sihanouk's ouster. The chances are good, nevertheless, that Lon Nol will bring off the changes without provoking a major political crisis. There will be much grumbling among politicians in the coming days, but Lon Nol's potential opponents lack a figure around whom they can coalesce. Any serious opposition would need support from the military, and army commanders appear to be strongly behind Lon Nol.

Lon Nol must now decide what to do with Sirik Matak, whose administrative skills are much needed and for whom Lon Nol has considerable personal respect. This could prove troublesome, because Matak is under strong attack from students and intellectuals, who find him a convenient scapegoat for what they regard as the delinquencies of the regime. Lon Nol's next move is likely to be a gesture toward broadening his government, perhaps by offering someone like In Tam, who was president of the constituent assembly, a position of ostensible importance.

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CYPRUS

President Makarios appears to be orchestrating a campaign aimed at increasing pressure on Athens. He is telling diplomatic callers, according to the US Embassy in Nicosia, that Athens itself advised in favor of the controversial Czech arms delivery to Cyprus but, in the hope of avoiding Turkish criticism, requested that the purchase be represented as a Cypriot initiative. The Archbishop's remarks have been leaked to the press in order to arouse Turkish suspicions of Athens. In the past few days, moreover, the pro-Makarios press in Cyprus has begun to needle Athens intensively, suggesting that there are splits within the Greek regime and casting aspersions on Foreign Minister Palamas.

At the same time, Makarios is fostering mounting opposition to the request of the three Greek Cypriot bishops for his resignation from the presidency. In one district, Greek Cypriots are calling for a referendum on replacing the local bishop-- a procedure that, while illegal in church eyes, could prevent that bishop from returning to his seat and thus dilute church pressure on Makarios.

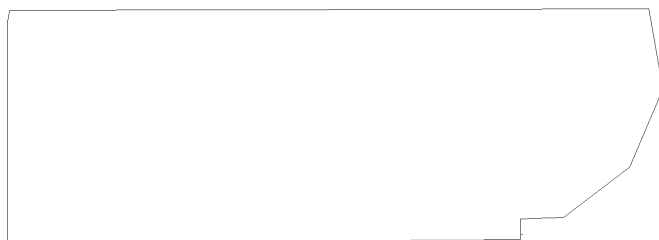
While this campaign is going on, Makarios has sequestered himself to prepare a formal reply to the Greeks in which he is expected to seek a compromise. Makarios may delay his reply until later this week in order to give his campaign time to take effect. He runs some risk, however, of merely provoking Athens and further jeopardizing prospects for stability on the island.

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